

# Angels in the Work of Flavius Josephus

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## 1. Introduction

I began researching the above topic by looking to the “General Index” in volume X of the LCL edition of the writings of Josephus. To my surprise, I found that the index lacks an entry for “angel.” This lacuna might be seen as symptomatic of a certain lack of attention to Josephus’ angelology by scholars.<sup>1</sup> Space constraints do not allow me to treat the topic in a comprehensive way here either. Rather, I shall focus my discussion on two aspects: Josephus’ use (and non-use) of the term “angel” in relation to the biblical usage and the historian’s *Engelbild* as compared to the Bible’s.

## 2. Terminology

As is well known, the Old Testament, in both its MT and LXX forms, uses the same word (מַלְאָךְ, ἄγγελος, respectively) to refer both to ordinary human carriers of communications functioning in an intra-human context and super-human, God-dispatched “messengers.”<sup>2</sup> Josephus follows this same usage. Of the 66 occurrences of the term ἄγγελος in his corpus as listed in Rengstorf’s *Concordance*, two thirds (43/44) refer to a human “messenger” bringing a communication, virtually always emanating from human source, to a human audience.<sup>3</sup> This leaves 22 cases

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1 The most detailed examination of Josephus’ angelology to date is that of Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 300-332 (He holds that Josephus’ treatment of the biblical angels is intended, *inter alia*, to counter the Zealots’ appeals to these figures in support of their revolutionary endeavors). Other, more summary discussions can be found in Schlatter, *Josephus* 32-34; Schlatter, *Theologie* 55-57; Feldman, *Interpretation* 212-213.

2 On Old Testament angelology, see Newsom, *Angels*.

3 The 43 instances are: *J.W.* 1.277,328; 2.45,620,626; 3.298,400, 433; 4.229,236,344,526; *Ant.* 2.344; 4.38; 5.243,357; 6.74,75; 7.34,141,144,145,246,249 (*bis*),360; 8.347; 9.20,21,22; 12.331; 14.286,349,372,451; 15.136; 16.286; 19.346; 20.87,89; *Life* 89.90. A special case

where the reference – given the context and the further qualifications used of the figure(s) – appears to be a super-human “messenger(s)”/ “angel(s)” who speak(s) and act(s) at God’s behest. Within this second grouping, one may further distinguish three categories. In two instances, Josephus speaks of such “angels” when writing independently of any biblical *Vorlage*.<sup>4</sup> In another fifteen instances, the historian reproduces a biblical mention of (super-human) “angel(s)” as found in MT and / or LXX.<sup>5</sup> In the remaining five cases, Josephus introduces mention of a (super-human) “angel” into a biblical context that lacks this.<sup>6</sup> Over against these two latter categories of Josephan usage stand the numerous instances where the historian eliminates a biblical mention of a (superhuman) angel by substituting some other designation for the being in question.<sup>7</sup> Various categories of such substitutions may be

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among these entries is *Ant.* 19.346 where a non-human, but this-worldly being, namely an owl appears as a “harbinger” of King Agrippa’s imminent chastisement by God. In the above listing, it is only in *Ant.* 15.132 where the human status of the “messenger” appears open to question. In that passage, part of a speech by Herod, the king refers to the Jews’ having learned their doctrines and laws “from the messengers (ἄγγέλων) sent by God.” On the prophets as the term’s intended referent here, see Mach, *Entwicklungsstadien* 307 n.<sup>80</sup> and contrast Schlatter, *Theologie* 56 and n<sup>1</sup> who, with reference to Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2, identifies them rather as angelic beings. Also worthy of note in the above listing is *J.W.* 3.400; here Josephus cites his address, while still a captive, to the Roman general Vespasian to whom he introduces himself as a “messenger of greater destinies” (ἄγγελος ... μειζόνων) and then goes on (*J.W.* 3.400) to aver that he has been “sent on this errand by God” (ὑπὸ θεοῦ προπεμπόμενος). In this instance, Josephus is making an implicit claim to the status of “prophet,” that is an authorized spokesman for God.

- 4 The cases are: *J.W.* 2.142 (the Essene proselytes swear to keep secret “the names of the angels”) and 2.401 (Agrippa calls “God’s holy angels” to witness that he has been completely forthright with his hearers).
- 5 The instances are: *Ant.* 1.73 (“angels of God” [this reading corresponds to that of the corrector of Codex Alexandrinus in Gen 6:2; in MT, Codex Vaticanus and the first hand of Codex Alexandrinus the reference is to “the sons of God”) consort with human women), 189 (// Gen 16:7 [an “angel of God” meets Hagar]), 200 (// Gen 19:1 [the angels reach Sodom]), 219 (// Gen 21:17 [an “angel of God” meets Hagar]); 4.108,109,110 (// Num 22:25,26,31 [a “angel (of God)” confronts Balaam]); 5.277,279, 280,284 (*bis*) (// Judg 13:3,6,9,20 [the interaction of the “angel of God” with Manoah and his wife]); 7.327 (*bis*) (// 2Sam 24:16-17a// 1Chr 21:15-16a [David sees the air-borne angel extending his hand against Jerusalem]); *J.W.* 5.388 (// 2Kgs 19:35 etc. [Josephus himself reminds the rebel defenders of Jerusalem that “the angel of God” destroyed the Assyrian host in a single night]).
- 6 These instances are: *Ant.* 1.196,198 (compare Gen 18:1-15 [the visit of the “three men” to Abraham]), 332,333,334 (compare Gen 32:22-32 [a “man” assaults Jacob who is given the name “Israel” as one who has [32:28] “striven with God and men”]).
- 7 Here I have in view those biblical episodes which Josephus does reproduce in some form, even while eliminating their references to an angel(s). In many other cases, Josephus simply passes over biblical materials (e.g., the Books of Ezekiel and Zechar-

distinguished. Thus, in ten different contexts he has God himself say or do things that the Bible (MT and/or LXX) attributes to “angel(s).”<sup>8</sup> On four further occasions, the historian replaces a biblical reference to “angel(s)” with some other designation for the being(s) / phenomena that speak(s) or act(s).<sup>9</sup> Finally, in a series of still other cases Josephus, in reproducing a portion of the Bible, passes over that portion’s angelic allusion(s).<sup>10</sup> In the same line, Josephus, in various cases where he does take over a biblical reference to angel(s), “reduces” the Bible’s recurrent, explicit use of angel terminology.<sup>11</sup>

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riah) mentioning angels such that there the question of how to deal with their angel-references did not arise for him.

- 8 See *Ant.* 1.202 (*bis*) (compare Gen 19:11,15 [the men/angels blind the Sodomites and warn Lot]), 232-235 (compare Gen 22:11-12,15-18 [the angel of the Lord twice addresses Abraham]); 5.133,134 (compare Judg 2:1,4 [an angel denounces the Israelites who are distressed by his words]; 7.329 (compare 1Chr 21:18 [the angel of the Lord again dispatches Gad to David]); 8.239 (compare 1Kgs 13:18 [the Bethel “prophet” claims that an angel spoke to him “by the word of the Lord”]); 9.20 (compare 2Kgs 1:3 [an angel prompts Elijah to accost Ahaziah’s messengers]); 10.21 (compare 2Kgs 19:35, etc. [an angel of the Lord slays the Assyrians – as Josephus himself states in *J.W.* 5.338; see n. 5]), 241 (compare Dan 3:28 [Nebuchadnezzar attributes the delivery of the three youths from the furnace to God’s “angel”]), 259 (compare Dan 6:22 MT and Theodotion [Daniel ascribes his safety in the lions’ den to God’s “angel”; see, however, LXX, which, like Josephus, makes the Deity the agent here], and 272 (compare Dan 8:19 [Gabriel (see 8:16) undertakes to interpret Daniel’s vision]).
- 9 See *Ant.* 1.279 (Jacob “sees phantoms of a nature more august than mortals,” while in Gen 28:18 he beholds “angels of God” upon the heavenly ladder), 325 [Jacob has “visions;” compare Gen 32:1 where “angels of God” meet him]; 5.213 (“a spectre in the form of a young man” manifests itself to Gideon, to whom “an angel of the Lord” appears in Judg 6:12; in the context of this passage, Judg 6:11,20,21,22 [*bis*] the “angel of the Lord/God” is mentioned an additional five times, none of which has a counterpart in Josephus); 8.349 (as in LXX 1Kgs 19:5, “someone” – rather than the “angel” of MT – touches Elijah); 10.269 (“someone” touches the prostrate Daniel; in the different versions of Dan 8:18 the “toucher” is “Gabriel” named in 8:16).
- 10 See Gen 24:7,40 (Abraham assures his servant that the Lord’s angel will guide him; compare *Ant.* 1. 242-245); 31:11 (Jacob reports what an angel of God told him in a dream to his wives; compare 1.310)); Exod 3:2 (the angel of the Lord appears to Moses in the burning bush; compare 2.226); 14:19 (the angel of the Lord stations himself behind the people at the sea; compare 2.320-344); 1Sam 29:9; 2Sam 14:17,20; 19:28 (in these four passages someone compares David to an “angel of God”; in each instance, Josephus’ version [see 6.355; 7.182-186, 268-270] leaves the comparison aside); 1Kgs 19:7 (the angel’s second [see n. 9] touching of Elijah; no equivalent in 8.349); 2Kgs 1:15 (the angel’s second [see n. 8] prompting of Elijah; in 9.26 Elijah goes to the bed-ridden King Ahaziah on his own).
- 11 Compare Gen 16:7-11 and *Ant.* 1.186-190 (Hagar’s rescue; the Bible mentions the angel of the Lord four times, Josephus once) Num 22:21-35 and *Ant.* 4.107-111 (Balaam’s ass; 12 times versus three); Judg 13:3-20 and 5.275-285 (the annunciation of Samson’s birth; twelve versus four times); 2Sam 24 // 1Chr 21 // 7.318-334 (David’s census; four times/ nine times/ two times, respectively).

From the above survey, it emerges that Josephus does not avoid the Bible's talk of (supernatural) "angels" *en principe*; indeed, as we have pointed out (see n. 6), he occasionally introduces such angels into his account where Scripture does not explicitly speak of them. At the same time, it is also clear that the historian does tend to omit, reduce and reword biblical mentions of these figures in many contexts.<sup>12</sup> What is not so clear, however, is whether Josephus is guided by any definite, consistent principles – other than his all-pervading practice of replacing the Bible's wording with his own – in dealing as he does with biblical angel language. Why, e.g., does he follow Judg 13 (// *Ant.* 5.275-285) in having an angel interact with Samson's parents-to-be, while in the case of the comparable account of Judg 6:11-24 (// *Ant.* 5.213-214) he eliminates any mention of an angel?<sup>13</sup> It can, however, be noted for the moment that in the course of Josephus' retelling of biblical history in *Antiquities*, source references to angels increasingly diminish, the last reproduction of such a reference being made by him in connection with David's census in *Ant.* 7.327.<sup>14</sup> This could suggest that for Josephus, angels pertain to the earlier period of biblical history, extending from just prior to the flood (angels impregnate human women, *Ant.* 1.73 // LXX\* Gen 6:2) down to late in David's reign.

### 3. Josephus' Portrayal of Angels

In this section of my essay, I sequentially survey what Josephus does (and does not) have to say about (superhuman) angels when mentioning these figures as compared with the indications concerning them in the corresponding biblical material.

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- 12 Where divergent versions of a given biblical text offered Josephus the possibility of either mentioning or not mentioning angels, he proceeds differently in different cases. Thus, in *Ant.* 1.73 he follows LXX Gen 6:2 against MT ("the sons of God") in making "angels" those who mate with human women. In 8.349 on the other hand, he aligns himself with LXX 1Kgs 19:5 in having "someone" – as opposed to the "angel" of MT – wakening Elijah, just as in 10.259 he makes Daniel attribute his deliverance from the lions directly to God in line with LXX Dan 6:22, whereas in MT and Theodotion the seer ascribes his rescue to God's "angel."
  - 13 In particular, in *Ant.* 5.281b-284, Josephus reproduces the sacrifice offered before the angel and the angel's ascent to heaven from Judg 13:15-20, while in his version of Judg 6 in 5.213-214 he passes over entirely the similar episode of Judg 6:17-24 with its fourfold mention of Gideon's angelic counterpart (see n. 9).
  - 14 Conversely, in *Antiquities* he does not follow the Bible in speaking of angels in connection with the post-Davidic figures of the Bethel prophet, Elijah, Hezekiah (see, however, *J.W.* 5.388) and Daniel.

Josephus' initial mention of angels comes in *Ant.* 1.73 where, in line with a LXX reading in Gen 6:2 (see n. <sup>5</sup>), he alludes to "angels of God" who generate hybrid beings ("giants," 6:4) with human women. While Josephus does thus reproduce the Bible's attribution of such a questionable activity to certain God-linked angels,<sup>15</sup> he does not take over the accompanying biblical "motivation" for this, namely, the angels' seeing that the women were "fair." In this instance, Josephus envisages angels as engaging in a very human and physical activity, copulation.

*Ant.* 1.189 and 219 may be taken together. Here, reproducing Gen 16:7 and 21:17 respectively, Josephus has Sarah's expelled Egyptian handmaid Hagar met by an "angel of God" (ἄγγελος θεῖος)<sup>16</sup> who addresses words of direction and assurance to her. In these instances, the angel assumes a speaking role, communicating on God's behalf with an ethnic foreigner.

Between the above two Josephan texts stand three references to angels occurring in a context (*Ant.* 1.196-206) inspired by the account of events involving Abraham and Lot related in Gen 18-19. In Gen 18:1-15 itself the term "angel(s)" is not used of Abraham's three visitors. Josephus, by contrast, twice introduces the term in his rendering (1.196-198) of the passage. In 1.196 he has the patriarch catch sight of "three angels" (compare "three men," 18:2) whom he supposes to be "foreigners." Whereas Gen 18:8 unequivocally speaks of the three's "eating" what Abraham puts before them, Josephus (like Philo, *Abraham* 118) represents them (1.197) as only seeming to do so.<sup>17</sup> Also Josephus' second mention of angels in 1.196-198 lacks a direct biblical basis. The mention comes in 1.198b, Josephus' replacement for the sequence of Gen 18:13-15 in which the Lord - apparently as one of the three "men" of 18:2 - addresses himself in turn to Abraham and Sarah. The historian's alter-

15 The historian's doing this is noteworthy, given his overall tendency to leave aside problematic portions (e.g., the Golden Calf story of Exod 32 or the incident of Micah's idol in Judg 17-18) of the biblical record when retelling this in the *Antiquities*. For more on the angel reference in *Ant.* 1.73, see Feldman, *Antiquities* 1-4 26, n. <sup>172</sup>.

16 In using this designation, employed elsewhere by him in *Ant.* 1.332; 4.108, in both instances, Josephus harmonizes the nomenclature of Gen 16:7 ("the angel of the Lord") and 21:17 ("the angel of God"). Both times too he has the angel encounter Hagar, presumably on earth, in line with the reference to the angel's finding Hagar by a spring in 16:17, whereas in 21:17 the angel speaks to her "from heaven." Compare *Ant.* 1.233-235, where in his rendition of Gen 22:11,15, Josephus eliminates those verses' allusions to the angel of the Lord's speaking to Abraham "from heaven" by having God himself address the patriarch; see n. <sup>8</sup>.

17 Here then Josephus evidences a hesitancy about ascribing physical activities/needs to angels that does not appear to be operative in *Ant.* 1.73, where angels copulate with human women; see above. On the wider Jewish tradition's handling of the visitors' (non-) eating, see Feldman, *Antiquities* 1-4 75, n. <sup>613</sup>.

native conclusion to the scene depicts the visitors' confessing their identity as "messengers of God" (ἄγγέλους τοῦ θεοῦ), of whom one had been sent to inform the couple of their child-to-be and the other two to "destroy the Sodomites." This last indication – drawn by anticipation from the words of the "men" to Lot in Gen 19:13 ("the Lord has sent us to destroy it [Sodom]") attributes a capacity for violence to angels, which, however, is not actually realized by them since in 1.203 (as in Gen 19:24) God himself effects the extermination of the Sodomites. Within Gen 18-19 "angels" are mentioned for the first time in 19:1, where two of them arrive at Sodom. Josephus reproduces this mention in 1.200a, though without the specification of their number (anticipated by him in 1.199b; see above). Gen 19:5 recounts the Sodomites' demand to "know" the angelic visitors Lot has previously taken in. Josephus' rendition (1.200b) of this development "motivates" the demand via his inserted references to the visitors as "young men of remarkably fair appearance" and their "youthful beauty" that evidence a marked interest in the angelic physique.<sup>18</sup> Whereas in what precedes, Josephus highlights – also terminologically – the angels' role in the events of Gen 18-19, in the continuation of his version of these chapters in 1.201-206, he diminishes their biblical significance, attributing to God himself the blinding of the Sodomites (1.202a; compare 19:11) and warnings to Lot (1.202b; compare 19:12-13,15) that the Bible ascribes rather to the angels.

Jacob encounters "angels" in Gen 28:18 and 32:1; Josephus replaces these references with mentions of "phantoms" (ὄψεις) and "visions" (φαντάσματα) in *Ant.* 1.279 and 325, respectively (see n. <sup>9</sup>). Similarly, he leaves aside Jacob's evocations of an angelic presence in his life as cited in Gen 31:11; 48:16. Conversely, he introduces a triple mention of an "angel" into his rendering (1.331-334) of the story (Gen 32:22-32) of Jacob's nocturnal combat with the figure Gen 32:24 calls a "man."<sup>19</sup> In 1.332b the figure, initially designated by Josephus (see 1.331,132a) as a "phantom / spectre" (φάντασμα), informs Jacob that he has defeated "an angel of God" (θεῖον ἄγγελον), while in 1.333a he explains (1.333a) the name "Israel" he now awards Jacob as meaning "an opponent of an angel of God" (τὸν ἀντιστάτην ἀγγέλῳ θεοῦ); compare the explanation attached to the conferral of the name in 32:28 ("you [Jacob] have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed"). Thereafter (1.333b) in a

18 The above insertions likewise reflect Josephus' tendency to heighten the romantic / erotic element of biblical happenings, on which see Feldman, *Interpretation* 185-188. He proceeds similarly with the angel of Judg 13; see below.

19 Corresponding to this triple usage is Josephus' threefold – likewise "non-biblical" – designation of Jacob's opponent as a "phantasm" (φάντασμα) in 1.331,332,334.

biblically unparalleled notice, he speaks of Jacob's perceiving his interlocutor to be "an angel of God" (ἄγγελον θεοῦ). Rewriting Gen 32:22-32 in this way Josephus transfers the physical aggressiveness but also the "defeat" that is there attributed to the Deity to an angel, thereby protecting divine transcendence and omnipotence.<sup>20</sup>

Passing over (or reformulating) the various mentions of the angels associated with Moses in the Book of Exodus (see n. 10), Josephus next refers to them in his version (*Ant.* 4.107-111) of the story of Balaam's ass (Num 22:21-35). According to his (compressed) retelling of the episode, "an angel of God" (ἄγγελου θεοῦ) first (4.108; cf. 22:25) confronts the mounted mantic "in a narrow place,"<sup>21</sup> then draws still nearer (4.109a; cf. 22:26), and finally makes himself "visible" also to Balaam, whom he reproaches for his mistreatment of the ass (4.110; cf. 22:31). What Josephus says of the angel here does correspond to Numbers' portrayal of the figure. At the same time, he also, it should be noted, leaves aside several elements of the biblical depiction of Balaam's angel: the "adversary" ("satanic") stance he takes towards the unseeing seer (22:22)<sup>22</sup> and the double mention of the drawn sword wielded by him (22:23, 31), as well his professed readiness to "slay" Balaam, had not the ass turned aside (22:33),<sup>23</sup> and his injunction that Balaam continue his journey (22:35 [which Josephus cites in 4.111 as God's own directive to the mantic]). Josephus' angel references in 4.107-411 recall those of 1.189, 219 in that, both times, the personage with whom the angel of God communicates is of foreign origin.<sup>24</sup>

20 At the same time, Josephus does not completely eliminate the ambiguity concerning the relationship between Jacob's interlocutor and the Deity that surrounds the narrative of Gen 32:22-32 in that in *Ant.* 1.334a he presents a version of the etymological notice of Gen 32:30 ("So Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'") that reads: "Jacob... named the place Phanuel, that is to say 'the face of God.'"

21 In speaking of the ass's (initial) perceiving of the angel Josephus (4.108b) introduces another designation for the latter, i.e. "the divine spirit" (τοῦ θεοῦ πνεύματος) that lacks a counterpart in Num 22:21-35 itself (and deviates from his own general tendency to eliminate scriptural references to God's "spirit"). For more on Josephus' "pneumatology," see Levison, *Debut*.

22 Compare Num 22:22 which speaks of the angel taking his stand in the way as Balaam's "adversary" (MT לַשָּׂטָן, LXX ἐνδίαβάλλειν αὐτόν). Whereas here Josephus thus leaves aside the Bible's explicit qualification of the angel as the "adversary" of Balaam, in 1.331-334 he goes beyond Gen 32:22-32 in thrice calling Jacob's "opponent" (τὸν ἀντιστάτην, 1.333) an "angel."

23 As a result of the above omissions, Josephus' angel in 4.107-111 appears less threatening than does his counterpart in Num 22:21-35.

24 Hagar is an Egyptian according to *Ant.* 1.187 (// Gen 16:1), while Balaam "hales from the Euphrates" (4.104; compare Num 22:5 where Balaam is summoned by Balak from "Pethor, which is near the River, in the land of Amaw").

Following another long hiatus, one next meets an angel in the *Antiquities* in Josephus' rendering of Judg 13 (the birth story of Samson) in *Ant.* 5.275-285. In citing the figure's appearance and announcement to the wife of Manoah in 5.277 (// 13:3), Josephus likewise embellishes the Bible's non-descript designation of him as "an angel of the Lord": "a spectre, an angel of God (φάντασμα ... ἄγγελος τοῦ θεοῦ)<sup>25</sup> in the likeness of a comely and tall youth (νεανία καλῶ παραπλήσιον μεγάλῳ)."<sup>26</sup> In the same line he has the woman report (5.279) to her husband, not the "very terrible," angel-like countenance of the "man of God" who had appeared to her (so Judg 13:6), but rather "what she had heard from the angel, extolling the young man's comeliness and stature (τοῦ νεανίκου τὸ κάλλος καὶ τὸ μέγεθος)." Thereafter in 5.280b the angel's second appearance to the woman is attributed to "the grace of God" (compare 13:9 where this happens due to God's hearing Manoah's prayer – a prayer which 5.280a ascribes rather to the wife). Josephus' final explicit use of the term "angel" in 5.275-285<sup>27</sup> occurs in 5.284, where basing himself on Judg 13:20, he makes the visitor "ascend to heaven" in the smoke of Manoah's sacrifice.<sup>28</sup>

25 There is a text-critical problem here. The above reading is that of the codices MSPL and is reproduced by Thackeray in Josephus, vol. V, 124 (although in his translation he omits the term "angel," reading "a spectre from God" in accordance with the emendation proposed by Niese, *Flavii Iosephi* I 346). The codices RO have τοῦ θεοῦ ἁστέρος, while the Latin version renders *apparuit ei angelus dei*.

26 The above indication concerning the angel's good looks recalls Josephus' (likewise inserted) reference to the angels who visit Sodom as "young men of remarkably fair appearance (νεανίσκους εὐπρεπία τῆς ὄψεως διαφέροντας)" in 1.200. Here in 5.277 the embellishment is part of Josephus' wide-going "eroticization" of the Judg 13 episode, on which see Feldman, *Interpretation* 475-478.

27 In contrast to Judg 13's twelve uses of the term, Josephus employs it a total of four times in his version.

28 In what precedes, Josephus has the couple's God-sent interlocutor decline Manoah's offer of food (compare 5.282 and Judg 13:15-16 and cf. *Ant.* 1.197 where Josephus has the three angels [1.196] "giving Abraham to believe" that they ate of his food). He omits the whole source sequence in which Manoah asks the angel's name (13:17) and receives the evasive reply "why do ask my name, seeing that it is wonderful?" (13:18). Compare Josephus' rendering of Gen 32:22-32 in *Ant.* 1.331-334 where he likewise passes over the exchange of 32:29 between Jacob and the man/angel regarding the latter's name. On the other hand, as in his handling of Gen 32:22-32 (see n. 20), Josephus does retain the Bible's ambiguity about the identity of the one the human parties encounters in Judg 13, given that in 5.284b he utilizes Manoah's fearful remark to his wife (13:22) about their having "seen God," citing his apprehension "some mischief might befall them from this vision of God (τῆς ὄψεως τοῦ θεοῦ)," as well as his wife's reassurance (cf. 13:23) that " ... it was for their good that it had been given them to see God (τὸν θεὸν ὁραθῆναι)."



The last appearance of a (superhuman) angel in the *Antiquities* itself occurs in 7.318-334,<sup>29</sup> Josephus' version of the census story of 2Sam 24 // 1Chr 21. His two uses of the term in this pericope both appear in 7.327: the angel stretches out his hand against Jerusalem, bringing the plague upon it (7.327a; see 24:16a // 21:15a), while David beholds the angel "being borne through the air towards Jerusalem with his sword drawn" (7.327b; see 24:17a // 21:16a).<sup>30</sup>

The one final mention of a supernatural angel in Josephus' corpus that calls for discussion here given its basis in the Bible itself stands in the context of the historian's speech to Jerusalem's defenders (J.W. 5.362-419). In connection with his argument that the Jews escaped destruction whenever they simply relied on God's protection rather than their own military capacities, Josephus there, drawing on 2Kgs 19:35 // Isa 37:36 // 2 Chr 32:21, reminds the rebels that "God's angel in one night destroyed that countless [Assyrian] host."<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

In view of the above survey, how then does Josephus' *Engelbild* compare with that of the Bible? Overall, the two corpora's presentations of angels largely coincide. Their communalities include the following: Both use one and the same term to refer to human and supernatural

29 On this text, see Begg, Version.

30 Compare *Ant.* 4.107-111 where Josephus omits the Bible's double reference (Num 22:23,31) to the "drawn sword" of Balaam's angel. Josephus' version leaves aside a whole series of further mentions of the angel found in 2Sam 24 and / or 1Chr 21: the Lord tells the destroying angel to desist (24:16ba// 21:15bα) already prior to David's plea (24:17aβb// 21:17; in 7.328 Josephus has David make his appeal before God causes the plague to cease [7.329]); the angel positions himself by the threshing floor of Araunah / Ornan (24:16bβ// 21:15bβ); the angel directs Gad to instruct David to erect an altar on Ornan's threshing floor (21:18; in 7.329 God himself gives Gad this instruction); the threshing Ornan sees the angel (21:20); at God's command the angel sheathes his sword (21:27); and David is unable to approach the Gibeon sanctuary due to his "fear of the sword of the angel of Lord" (21:30).

31 As was pointed out in n. 9, in *Ant.* 10.21 Josephus makes God himself the one who afflicts the Assyrian camp with a "pestilent sickness." Feldman, Interpretation 213 n. 62 explains the difference between Josephus' two reminiscences of 2Kgs 19:35, etc. in terms of J.W. 5.388's being addressed to Jews (for whom the activity of angels would be an accepted belief) in contrast to 10.21 where he is writing for Gentiles (to whom such a belief would not be so familiar). Mach, Entwicklungsstadien 311-312 notes the difference between the two Josephan passages, but does not offer an explanation of it. In any case, the substitution of "God" for the biblical "angel" in 10.21 does correspond to Josephus' recurrent tendency in the *Antiquities* to have the Deity himself do what the Bible ascribes to angels; see, e.g., the comparable case of *Ant.* 1.202 where God, rather than the men / angels of Gen 19:11, blinds the reprobate Sodomites.

"messengers." For both as well "angels" are beings entirely subordinate to God at whose disposition they stand, as is underscored by the recurrent references to them as "angels of God/the Lord."<sup>32</sup> For their interactions with humans, angels assume a visible, physical form, i.e. that of male human beings. They address themselves to both men and women, and to Israelites and foreigners (Hagar, Balaam). In their earthly manifestations, biblical and Josephan angels engage in such human, bodily activities as copulating (see *Ant.* 1.73), fighting (1.332-333), stretching out their hands and wielding a sword (see 7.327); unlike humans, however, they have the capacity to move through the air (see 5.284; 7.327b). As God's envoys to the human sphere, they bring his announcements and directives (see, e.g., 1.189, 219, 333; 5.277) to the designated recipient(s), while also undertaking punitive tasks against guilty persons (see 1.198; 7.327; *J.W.* 5.388). Finally, like the Bible, Josephus moves readily from references to angels to mentions of God himself (compare, e.g., Gen 18-19 and 1.196-206; Judg 13 and 5.275-285).

All of the above features are ones shared by biblical and Josephan angels. The historian's angelology does, however, differ from the Bible's in several respects, both negative and positive. Negatively, he nowhere gives names to his angels, as Scripture does occasionally, nor does he pick up on the problematic surrounding the disclosure of an angel's name in his version of the episodes of Gen 32:22-32 (compare 1.331-334: Jacob) and Judg 13 (compare 5.275-285: Manoah).<sup>33</sup> In the same line, he does not represent angels functioning as the heavenly patrons of the nations as does Dan 10:13, 21, nor as elucidating apocalyptic visions as angels do in Dan 7-12 and Zech 1-6. Diverging from Gen 18:8, he (1.197) makes it clear that the angels did not actually eat what Abraham set before them. Positively, he goes beyond the biblical account in his insistence on the "spectral," "phantasmic" quality of angelic appearances (see, e.g., 1.331-334; 5.277) as well as on the angels' good looks and the erotic stimulus they generate (see 1.200; 5.277, 279; cf. 1.73, the angels' copulation with the human women).

In sum, angels seem to be part of the biblical *Weltbild* that Josephus did not reject or question. On the other hand, he does very little in the way of developing the Bible's angelology, whether via theoretical dis-

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32 In contrast to the Bible where the designations "angel of God" and "angel of the Lord" alternate, sometimes in close proximity (see, e.g., Judg 6:20 and 6:21), Josephus does not employ the latter expression. On the historian's virtually complete avoidance of the term Lord (LXX Κύριος) as a divine title, this likely due to its non-currency in that sense in secular Greek, see Begg, *Account* 45 n. 218.

33 On the other hand, he does allude in *J.W.* 2.142 to Essene secret lore about "the names of the angels." See n. 4.

cussion about the nature of angels or in his rendering of scriptural episodes involving angels. In fact, he rather significantly reduces the place and role of angels in his account of Israel's history. Nor can it be said that Josephus is particularly consistent in his handling of biblical data about angels. Thus in the case of the comparable angelic appearances to Gideon and the future parents of Samson in Judg 6 and 13 respectively he retains the scriptural identification of the human party's interlocutor in the latter but not the former instance. Similarly, he seems to have a problem with angels' eating, but not their equally physical copulation and the erotic excitement they generate among both men (the Sodomites) and women (the wife of Manoah), while he attributes the destruction of Sennacherib's army on one occasion to an angel (*J.W.* 5.388), on another to God himself (*Ant.* 10.21). It would appear then that (supernatural) angels were simply not a major concern to Josephus – as they were, e.g., to apocalyptic writers and the Qumranites – just as one does not find clear, consistent *Tendenzen* operative in his treatment of these figures throughout his writings.<sup>34</sup> Here, as in so many other respects, the historian oscillates between rather close adherence to the biblical data and marked departures from these without one's being able to say with any assurance why he proceeds as he does in a particular case.

## Abstract

This study investigates Josephus' angelology in relation to that of the Bible with regard both to the relevant terminology and their respective *Engelbilder*. From the study it emerges that Josephus does not systematically eliminate all biblical references to angels from his own presentation and, indeed, sometimes inserts such references where the Bible lacks them. On the other hand, he often eliminates or reformulates mentions of angels found in the Bible. In addition, Josephus does not go much beyond the Bible's portrayal of angels, other than to underscore their physical beauty and the erotic affect they have on the humans to whom they appear. Overall, it remains unclear what – if any –

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34 The authors cited in n. 1 have adduced a variety of factors operative in Josephus' treatment of angels, e.g., concern for monotheism and divine transcendence, consciousness of the skeptical sensibilities of his Greco-Roman audience, interest in not abetting the Zealots' appeal to angels as patrons of their revolutionaries activities. I do not deny that such factors were at work in varying degrees in Josephus' handling of biblical episodes involving angels; I simply question whether any of them were applied by him in a consistent, self-conscious fashion.

*Tendenzen* are operative in Josephus' handling of the Bible's angel material and why he treats a given biblical angel episode as he does.

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